

Rocky Mountain National Park

Fact Sheet

March 2010

Grand Ditch Breach Restoration – Environmental Impact Statement

Background

- On May 30, 2003, the Grand Ditch, a trans-basin, water-diversion canal in the northwest corner of Rocky Mountain National Park breached its bank.
- The breach saturated an adjacent hillslope which gave way, sending a massive (48,000 yd³) mud- and rock-slide down into Lulu Creek and the headwaters of the Colorado River.
- Approximately 22 acres and 1.5 miles of stream, riparian, upland, and wetland habitat were injured.
- In 2006, the U.S. Department of Justice, on behalf of the National Park Service, filed a civil lawsuit against the Water Storage and Supply Company, owners of the Grand Ditch under the terms of the Park System Resource Protection Act which provides for the payment of compensation by private parties for damages to park resources.
- In May of 2008, an out of court settlement was reached in which the Water Storage and Supply Company agreed to pay Rocky Mountain National Park nine million dollars in damages.
- Rocky Mountain National Park and a team of cooperating researchers are conducting ongoing research to refine our understanding of the nature and extent of the injuries caused by the breach and to help determine desired future conditions for the impacted area.



Current Status

- Rocky Mountain National Park is starting a multi-year process to complete an Environmental Impact Statement to guide the restoration of the breach-impacted area.
- The purpose of the restoration project will be to restore the hydrological processes, ecological services and wilderness character impacted by the 2003 Grand Ditch Breach.
- The challenge in developing the restoration plan is to balance short term impacts to the natural systems and wilderness character of the area, with long term benefits to the same.
- Restoration will focus on restoring healthy trajectories for both hydrological function (e.g. surface and groundwater dynamics) and ecological community evolution (e.g. riparian, wetland, and upland habitat).

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- Alternatives to be considered will likely include a combination of the following: Allowing natural (passive) restoration to occur where appropriate; stabilizing steep, unstable slopes with an engineered solution; removing deposited sediment and redistributing it through the impacted area or elsewhere; removing dead timber from the impacted area and/or using it in the restoration process; regrading and recontouring areas to restore appropriate morphology and function; native plant restoration with appropriate, locally gathered plant materials; may require the use of motorized equipment such as chainsaws, heavy lift helicopters, and earthmoving equipment; may require temporary fencing to protect native plant restoration areas.
- Major issues to be considered in this restoration planning process include short-and-long-term potential impacts to: wilderness character; geological resources; geological hazards; soundscapes; surface and groundwater hydrology; stream channel, floodplain and wetland morphology and function; water quality; riparian and wetland communities; species of special concern (plants and animals); wildlife habitat; aquatic habitat; visitor experience; long-term resource productivity; archeological and historical sites.

Public Comment

- We will be gathering input from National Park Service staff, other agencies and the public to develop a set of alternatives for restoration of the breach-impacted area.
- Rocky Mountain National Park plans to conduct public scoping meetings for the Environmental Impact Statement in both Grand Lake and Fort Collins, Colorado during the first week in June 2010.
- Information will be available for public review and comment online at <http://parkplanning.nps.gov/romo>.